

Devotional Studies No. 22

One's New Life in Christ

While in prison, Paul writes to the believers in Colossae about their spiritual life. Chapter three begins with a call to reflect upon their new obligations. He reminds them of their baptism, which baptism marked the beginning of a new life. One is now confronted with a new set of obligations. Not only is the Gospel designed to put men and women in a new relationship with God based upon “righteousness by faith,” but it also raises men and women from the inferior fascination of the world to a higher interest, an interest that seeks to give glory to God. These Christians departed from the old life of sin in their participation in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ through baptism. He is calling upon these individuals to live for those things that have eternal value. Unfortunately, many Christians still do not live their lives in such a way that it portrays that they belong to that higher world—the world in which he or she now lives and reigns.

Christians should constantly remind themselves that the dark chapter of their history of sin lies behind them. Paul stresses that in baptism they died with Christ and, at the same time, broke with the old life of sin and rebellion against God. For this reason, Paul goes right to the jugular vein of decision and says: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (**Colossians 3:5**). He begins this list of sins by calling attention to sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (**3:5**). Next, he enumerates other sins—sins that find an outlet in speech. Again, one should pay attention to this list: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language (**3:8**). How do you measure up to this new chapter in your daily walk with God following your baptism? Do you read the Word of God daily? Do you gather with the saints on Sunday? Is there a difference in your life after your conversion to Christ? The Holy Spirit, through Paul, demands a complete change of nature. Every believer must put on the new self; in other words, there must be a complete renewal of one’s activities.

For Paul, this new life must make an effort toward renewal—“renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” This new relationship between God and humanity also demands an absence of race hatred among the people of God. The world at large was divided into factions, as is the world today. Paul speaks of Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian, and slave and free. The Greeks considered all foreigners barbarians; the Romans considered all foreigners Scythians. Paul, too, puts across the disappearance of these walls of separation to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (**Galatians 3:28**). This knowledge that Paul addresses is not simply intellectual knowledge; but rather, this knowledge

depends on an inward renewal of one's nature. Paul states the core of his teaching this way: "but Christ is all, and is in all" (**Colossians 3: 11**).

Paul immediately reminds them of their high calling: "Therefore, as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved" (**3:12**). The dark chapter of their lives is to be replaced with new clothing. He then lists some of this clothing: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (**3:12**). When dealing with believers, one often discovers that these enumerated characteristics are not always manifested in the life of God's children. Paul now turns his attention to how Christians are to relate to one another. How are Christians to react toward the unlovely? Listen once more to Paul as he goes right to the very heart of Christianity. He cuts away all underbrush as he states plainly the answer: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (**3:13**). In Christ, one can no longer adhere to the practice that belonged to one's old nature. In Christ, one must now exhibit a nature of a different kind—forgiveness. Followers of Jesus are to have the same outlook on life as Christ Himself had. When one accepts Christ's gift of forgiveness, one, too, must share in that same forgiving spirit. Paul narrates it this way to the Romans: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**).

How can one dress himself or herself with that attire mentioned in this short exhortation? The answer is found in reflection upon one's new status in Christ—"chosen people, holy and dearly loved." How does one make allowances for others? Paul's answer is "love." Again, he writes: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (**Colossians 3:14**). Love acts as a girdle, or belt, that holds unity together. Without love, all of the other garments are useless. Paul addresses the bond of love to the Corinthians as the one thing that never fails (**1 Corinthians 13:8**). The first three verses of Colossians Chapter Three unfold the futility of good actions without love. Christians may carry out Christian duties, but, at the same time, remain hard and callous toward other believers and suspicious of other believer's motives. This kind of attitude repels rather than attracts others to Christ. And finally, Paul writes: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (**Colossians 3:15**). The "peace of Christ" is two-fold in nature: (1) reconciliation with God and (2) friendship with other individuals.

Since Christians are called to be members of one body, they are meant to exercise this peace-loving temper; that is to say, the love and peace inspired by Christ. Jesus tells His disciples: "**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**" ³⁵ **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another**" (**John 13:34-35**). Following this statement, Jesus also reminds them of His peace: "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives**" (**14:27**). Where there is peace within the hearts of God's children, differences can be overcome. The message of the Gospel of Christ is to be so deeply planted in the believer's mind that it controls all his or her actions and all his or her thinking. As one reflects upon His love and peace, this reflection should cause everyone to "be thankful" (**Colossians 3:15**). Are you thankful for God's mercy and forgiveness? If so, one should allow the likeness of Christ to envelope one's whole being.